Holding Effective Employee Layoff Notification Meetings



Holding a layoff or termination notification meeting is a difficult and emotional experience for all involved. Effective preparation and clarity are key elements of conducting an effective layoff or termination notification meeting. To assist you in planning and conducting a termination notification meeting we have outlined some key steps to take and provided ideas for what you might say and do before, during and after such a meeting.

Getting Prepared In Anticipation Of Giving A Layoff Notice

- Be as transparent as possible about business struggles or plans for a change in direction of the organization or a department by sharing information in leadership and organizational updates, announcements and at meetings. The groundwork for minimizing potential problems includes communicating regularly, on going and with transparency, whether to an entire organization, team or individual.
- If the layoff is precipitated by an individual employees performance ensure that conversations and steps to address the performance concerns have been taken and documented.
- Prepare what you will tell your employee(s) about the possibility of layoffs without being specific. If you are afraid some good employees might jump ship when hearing about concerns and you know they will not be among those laid off, have a confidential conversation with them about the role you see for them in the organization while not mentioning any other specific plans for layoffs for other employees.
- Sharing general information with employees will allow them information they may need to make decisions and plans to mitigate the impact of potential job loss.

Layoff Meeting Preparation

- Know the reasons for the layoffs and be prepared to share as much as you are able to (for example budget cuts, department reorganization, loss of a major customer, change in company direction). Also share what you are able about how the decision was made to select the employee’s position for elimination.
- Know the process that follows the notification so you can answer questions. Bring a document outlining the steps so the employee has something to focus on and have in hand when leaving. This document can include:
    - The Notification of Termination letter including last day of work and

severance details if relevant.
    - Services in the community including counselling services, re-employment services, financial advising services and more.
    - If your organization provides outplacement or continued access to EAP (Employee Assistance) provide this information.
    - Questions the employee may want to ask during or after the notification meeting and answers where possible (not specific to this employee but a common document)
    - Next steps the employee should take to prepare for departure including housekeeping details such as turning in keys, equipment and so on.
- Determine if the employee will leave immediately after being notified of the layoff or will continue to work through the period of notice.
- Select an appropriate time and location for the notification meeting (for ideas on selecting a time for the meeting read this recent article from the Insider [Why Timing Matters When Laying Off Employees]
- How to notify the employee about a meeting; consider having an appropriate person, such as the employees supervisor or manager notify the employee of the meeting and not HR
- Determine if the employee will need accommodation for the meeting, including accommodation for language barriers or disability. Assess if the employee has a history of physical or mental health conditions that could be a problem during the meeting.
- Consider the impact of the employee's departure on co-workers and clients and be prepared to follow up with co-workers soon after the notification occurs.

The Notification Meeting

- The employee's immediate supervisor or the department manager should lead the notification meeting.
- Once the meeting begins get to the point and avoid banter and small talk. Deliver the message directly and allow the employee time to read the written notice of layoff you are providing.
- Do not make comments about the situation or decision that could compromise the decision.
- Be sensitive to the employee's situation, but also be direct and unwavering. Make sure that the employee knows the decision is final and there is no room of negotiation about the layoff.
- Be sensitive to the employee's response. Showing compassion is not saying you agree with the employee. It is okay to express regret if accurate.
- Listen to the employee and after the meeting document anything that could lead to a potential problem.

Preparing for and Addressing Possible Employee Reactions During the Notification Meeting

Be prepared that the employee may become upset and you may see the following reactions:

- Denial and pleading or bargaining for another opportunity
- Resistance, defensiveness and/or threatening behaviours and words
- Asking to speak to someone who is in charge of making the decisions
- Threaten a lawsuit or to go public or retaliation (document any comments about retaliation)
- Make accusations of discrimination or indicating the decision was in retaliation
- Breakdown emotionally and explain the difficultly of their personal or financial situation

If you prepared for the meeting you will have the information and resources you need to answer questions and explain the situation. The best responses to the employee's reactions include remaining calm, listening and providing information. If necessary offer to give the employee a brief break or delay the rest of the meeting until the employee is composed.

You may consider having a counsellor or outplacement counsellor on standby whom the employee can speak to immediately after or within 24 hours of notification (a phone call or SKYPE call may suffice). This may be a good option in particular if you anticipate the employee may have a physical or emotional breakdown based on a history of health concerns.

Sample Dialogue With Employee

Greet the employee upon arrival, invite the employee into a private meeting room and ask the employee to have a seat. Do not yet have any documents sitting waiting on the table.

"Hello _____ . Thank you for meeting with me here today. I have called this meeting because I want to personally meet with you to inform that, unfortunately your position with the organization has been eliminated. This letter is an official notification of your layoff. I am sorry but there are no other positions available for you."

Hand the document folder to the employee with the notification letter on top. Pause to allow the employee time to read the notice and process the information.

"As you may know we have been planning to make changes or we have been experiencing financial challenges (be as accurate as possible with the information) over the past few months. These changes/challenges have necessitated difficult business decisions. Your department has had to make cuts and your position was eliminated as a result. This is a final decision taken after thoughtful deliberation about the future of our organization."

If the employee was on good terms with the organization you may add the following

'We appreciate your efforts and this decision is not a personal decision or a reflection of the value we placed on your contributions."

Wrap up and give the employee time to ask questions.

"I know this is difficult news to hear. Please let me know if you have any questions"

If the employee does not seem to know what to ask mention to the employee that there is a list of possible questions and answers in the document package you have provided. Let the employee look at the questions. If the employee asks any questions answer questions honestly and appropriately.

Do not minimize the experience or the employee's emotions by trying to cheer them up or point out things could be worse.

While you may wish to continue with the meeting, consider what might be best for the employee and whether he/she will hear any further information you may deliver at this time. In most cases, you should take the time to deal with the emotional reactions and responses of the employee before turning to any "housekeeping" matters you need to deal with.

"Would you like to take a break and continue or leave for the rest of the day or

continue on another day?”

When the employee is ready to continue focus on discussing housekeeping details.

“I would like to discuss with you the process of wrapping up your role and leaving the organizations and the resources and assistance we can provide to you.”

Follow the list in the document you have provided allowing the employee to follow along and ask questions. This list would include the process for the employee to gather belongings, what information to provide to colleagues, clients, customers or others the employee has contact with, and how the employee will receive final payouts, documents and related information.

After the Notification Meeting

Conduct a follow-up meeting or phone call (if the employee is not longer coming into work) with the employee to see how he/she is coping and provide any information you were not able to provide in the notification meeting. If the employee is continuing to work until the separation date try to maintain a normal supervision but be aware of the employees’ emotional state.

Provide the employee and other employees with direction on what information should be shared internally and externally. For example consider how and when clients or customers who work with the employee will be informed.

Provide direction to other employees and consult with the laid off employee about how everyone will acknowledge the situation and the departure. The Insider recently posted an article that may be useful in addressing this situation “Saying Goodbye After Letting Go of Good Employees’

The layoff of an employee represents a loss and a transition for all involved. Being prepared, having a routine and following traditions (as outlined in the above mentioned article) have the potential to help easy the transition.